



## The Coalition Weekly Report Wednesday, April 15, 2020

Volume 4

Number 14

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### Editor's Note

Despite the usual aggressive efforts to find news about the parks made by our correspondents, both regular and intermittent, there's been a dearth of stories lately due to the media's near complete focus on the pandemic. It's likely, therefore, that we'll skip the April 22nd edition and resume publication on April 29th – that is, unless one or more significant stories break over the coming week.

### Incidents

#### **National Park System Coronavirus Response Update**

The summary that follows focuses on articles of note on how the NPS is dealing with the pandemic, as there are far too many closure and modified closure notices from the 400+ units of the National Park System to list them here. You can, however, find specifics on the status of just about any park by going to the Service's "[Active Alerts In Parks](#)" webpage and using the search engine to find information on a particular site. Here's this week's compilation of media reports:

- *DOI Putting Staffers, Public At Risk* – On April 9th, *Sierra*, the national magazine of the Sierra Club, posted a story entitled "As National Parks Remain Open, Staffers Worry They Are at Risk." Author Adam Federman sums up the issue thusly: "The Interior Department's reluctance to close parks—especially those that draw large numbers of tourists—even as the pandemic is sweeping across the country is being criticized by current and former National Park Service staff who say that the inconsistent messaging and leadership's failure to take decisive action is putting staffers, the public, and rural communities at risk. Today, more than 200 national park sites remain open. In contrast, Canada closed all of its national parks, historic sites, and marine conservation areas on March 25." The article contains [a link to an April 3rd memorandum](#) in which the Service's epidemiology branch chief has advised DOI to restrict park access in communities where stay-at-home orders are in place and to discontinue dormitory-style housing for new employees and concessionaires. Failure to limit visitation to national parks, the memo warns, will increase the risk of negative outcomes for the federal workforce and the public. The article then lists some of the impacts that DOI's "dangerously uneven and contradictory" policies are having on the Service. Source: Adam Federman, [Sierra](#).
- *Reopening Parks* – Despite the continuing high number of coronavirus cases, it's inevitable that the current pandemic will abate and that parks will reopen. But how to do that? "Overarching concerns for the health of staff, concession workers, and visitors are complicating the reopening of national park sites shuttered due to the coronavirus pandemic," reports *National Parks Traveler*. "Business won't return to normal quickly or uniformly, with many parks confronting a unique set of issues they must resolve before they can welcome the public's

return. Exactly when individual parks will reopen is unknown, with some units of the National Park System already saying they'll be closed into late June, and others saying they might try staggered openings before summer officially arrives." Then there's the matter of hiring and housing the summer work force. "Seasonal workforces, thousands of individuals strong, normally are getting their positions for the summer season finalized now. But bringing workers in from not just across the country but possibly from throughout the world and housing them in dormitory settings is a potentially deadly proposition, something the National Park Service's public health director has warned David Vela, the de facto Park Service director, about." One method for dealing with this is to bring on some seasonal workers in waves -- a process called 'onboarding' -- with the first expected to arrive sometime in May. Source: Kurt Repanshek, [National Parks Traveler](#).

- *DOI's Override Of NPS Operational Leadership Program* – The Service's slow and inconsistent response to the pandemic is the subject of an article in *Mashable*: "The problem is, the National Park Service never had to become mired in this weeks-long, belabored controversy of how and when to close parks...That's because the Park Service has a system — which employees receive formal training in — that grants any worker, however far down in the ranger hierarchy, the ability to raise the danger flag and halt risky situations." That system is Operational Leadership, a program taught to employees Servicewide over recent years "that hammers home the idea that if a situation is too risky, any employee can slam on the brakes and ask for the risks to be mitigated, avoided, or stopped entirely." Despite receiving requests to close based on such analyses, DOI refused to permit superintendents to act on a demonstrable hazard to visitors – which *Mashable* points out represents a "top-down, out-of-touch, slow, bureaucratic system [that] is the polar opposite of the Operational Leadership strategy." Source: Mark Kaufman, [Mashable](#).

See also the Coalition's response to the issue of allowing parks to remain open during the pandemic in the "Coalition Actions" section further on in this edition.

### **National Park System Man Pleads Guilty To Planning Terrorist Attacks**

A 23-year-old Georgia man has pleaded guilty of planning to attack the White House, Statue of Liberty, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial and other sites

In March, 2018, a member of the Atlanta community reported that Hasher Jallal Taheb was planning the attacks as part of a desire to participate in a jihad. The FBI launched an undercover operation later that year and found that Taheb's initial targets included the White House and the Statue of Liberty. Taheb's plans subsequently added other prospective targets, included the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and a synagogue.

During an undercover meeting with Taheb in January 2019, he described weapons and explosives he wanted to use in the attacks, including semi-automatic weapons, improvised explosive devices, an anti-tank weapon and hand grenades.

Sentencing will take place this June.

Source: Stefanie Dyga, [Sinclair Broadcast Group](#).

### **Great Smoky Mountains NP Private Plane Comes Down In Park**

Georg Kustermann was piloting a small plane west of Clingmans Dome last Friday morning when the aircraft developed unidentified problems, forcing him to deploy the plane's parachute and make an emergency landing in the park (yes, planes now have their own parachutes – [watch this unrelated short video to see how they work](#)).

Kustermann was found by a Tennessee Highway Patrol helicopter early in the afternoon and was picked up and flown to Gatlinburg Pigeon Forge Airport.

Kustermann was not injured and left the airport under his own care. The park will work with the Federal Aviation Administration to complete an investigation.

Source: [WVLT News](#).

## **National Park System Follow-ups On Previously Reported Incidents**

Below are short follow-ups on incidents previously reported in this newsletter.

- *Olympic NP/Mount Rainier NP* – A man who broke into dozens of vehicles at Mount Rainier and Olympic has been sentenced to two years in federal prison after he serves a more than two-year state prison term. Michael Pickering, 41, broke into at least four dozen cars at more than a half dozen different trailheads and parking lots in the two parks. Over a month-long period starting in late March 2019, Pickering smashed windows and stole from parked vehicles. He then used stolen credit and debit cards to make over \$50,000 in purchases at various stores. Pickering was arrested after walking out of a store where he used victims' bank cards. Source: [KOMO News](#).
- *Zion NP* – Marshall Miller, who was caught BASE jumping from Great White Throne in March, has been fined \$5,000 and banned from Zion for two years. The judge also warned him that any new offense would result in a jail sentence. Marshall wore a wingsuit and glided before deploying his parachute and landing in the area below Angels Landing, which is a nesting ground for endangered California condors. Source: Scott D. Pierce, [Salt Lake Tribune](#).
- *Cape Hatteras NS* – The 72-foot-long scallop boat *Ocean Pursuit*, which ran aground near Oregon Inlet around six weeks ago, remains stuck on Bodie Island. The owner has remained in contact with the park and other authorities, but is currently unable to provide a timeframe as to when the vessel can be removed. The article has a couple of photos of the *Ocean Pursuit*, which definitely looks like it's not going anywhere until that time. Source: [Island Free Press](#).

## **National Fire Situation**

### **National Interagency Fire Center NIFC Continues To Focus On Covid Fire Response Plans**

NIFC remains at PL 1.

Ten new large fires were reported last week in seven states – Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and North Carolina. Wildland firefighters were able to contain nine of them.

All wildland fire agencies remain committed to wildland fire readiness through active hiring of fire personnel, adjusting training practices to minimize contact and slow COVID-19 spread potential, and assessing prescribed burning operations. All wildland firefighting partners are working together to plan for fire activity during the pandemic:

- Area Command teams (Team 1 Stutler, Team 2 Sexton and Team 3 Jalbert) along with IMT2 (EA Silver Team) have been assigned by the National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) to develop a national COVID-19 wildland fire response plan.
- NIMO (Houseman) has been assigned to COVID-19 support at Forest Service headquarters in Washington D.C.
- IMT1 (GB Team 2) has been assigned to Intermountain R4 Regional Office COVID-19 Support, providing complexity analysis, risk assessments and short/long-term planning guidance.

- IMT1 (NW Team 3) has been assigned to the Spokane Regional Health District, WA, assisting with strategic planning and building capacity.

NIFC Predictive Services has issued its wildland fire potential outlook for the period from April to June. It can be found at [this link](#).

### Resource Commitment Trend

Category	March 27	April 3	April 3
Area Command Teams	3	3	3
NIMO Teams	2	1	1
Type 1 Teams	1	1	2
Type 2 Teams	1	1	1
Crews	1	1	1
Engines	6	30	80
Helicopters	0	3	0
Total FF/Overhead	22	163	281

### Fires/Acreage

Category	2010-2019 Ave	2020 Total	Difference
United States: YTD Fires	12,610	8,275	- 4,335
United States: YTD Acres	548,490	191,665	- 356,825

Sources: [NICC Incident Management Situation Report](#); [National Interagency Fire Center](#); [IMSR Archives](#); [InciWeb Incident Information System](#).

## Congressional Actions

Reports on legislation, upcoming hearings and new public laws of relevance to the national parks, prepared by Don Hellmann, former assistant director, legislative and Congressional affairs for the National Park Service.

### New Public Laws

Nothing to report.

### Senate Actions

The Senate was not in session last week.

### House Actions

The House was not in session last week.

## National Park Service

### National Park System

A summary of articles pertaining to management and oversight of the NPS, to current trends and issues affecting the National Park System, or to either all or parts of the entire system.

- “*You Can Find Your Park, Man*” – There’s a fine, [“must see” video](#) about the parks on YouTube called “You Can Find Your Park, Man” that’s a parody of Geoff Mack’s celebrated C&W song “I’ve Been Everywhere.” There are no obvious credits with it, but it was apparently produced by Jean Lafitte and New Orleans Jazz on behalf of #findyourpark. Source: [YouTube](#).
- *Do You Know Your National Parks?* – *Travel and Leisure* has produced [a video quiz](#) that asks viewers to identify national parks. Each tableau has three pictures and asks which one is of a particular named park. Light fare, but a nice change from pandemic news. Source: Stacey Leasca, [Travel and Leisure](#).
- *Visiting Parks Online* – CBS Sunday Morning had a feature this past weekend on how to visit parks online during the pandemic. It includes links to a dozen or so park sites where you can listen to coyotes or a thunderstorm, go on Skype field trips, or see the parks themselves. Source: Conor Knighton, [CBS Sunday Morning](#).

## **Around The Parks**

Park reports are in alphabetical order. Included are proposals in the works for new areas or changes in designation for current NPS units.

- *Statue of Liberty NM* – “The Statue of Liberty is famous for her torch-bearing arm,” reports Live Science, “but newly discovered blueprints reveal that this arm was revised to be more slender at the last minute, changing the plans of the French engineer Gustave Eiffel who helped design the statue. The newly analyzed blueprints show that Eiffel originally designed Lady Liberty’s arm to be more robust and vertical — in a word, sturdier — than it is today...But the blueprints reveal that someone else, perhaps the statue’s sculptor, Frédéric-Auguste Bartholdi, went in with red ink and revised the arm to be more slender and tilted, making it more aesthetically pleasing, but also more fragile.” The cache of historic documents also included 22 original engineering drawings of Lady Liberty, many with notes and calculations in the margins. Source: Laurel Geiger, [Livescience.com](#).

## **Commenting On NPS Projects**

A listing of significant National Park Service projects which are currently open to public comment, plus due dates and URL’s to related sites. Park/agency names for new entries are in **boldface**.

- *Glacier Bay NP&P* – The park’s 1989 wilderness visitor use management plan will be updated this year. [Comments will be taken until April 21st.](#)
- ***Great Basin NP*** – The park is planning a project in which fuels within its Mission 66 residential and maintenance area – including air quality buildings, the observatory, and dump station – will be substantially reduced. The total project area is 17 acres. Project goals are to increase defensible space in the residential and maintenance areas and reduce the risk of structural damage or loss in the event of a fire. [Comments will be taken until April 18th.](#)
- ***Lewis and Clark NHP*** – The park is planning to rehab its visitor center to fix numerous safety and accessibility issues that need to be corrected and to improve energy efficiency. [Comments will be taken until April 26th.](#)
- *North Cascades NP* – The park is developing an environmental assessment to make modifications to the trail and camps in lower Thunder Creek in the Stephen Mather Wilderness. Flooding, erosion, and resource protection concerns have informed the proposed action. The preliminary proposal is to reroute 1,500 feet of trail and relocate a hiker and group camp in the vicinity of McAllister Camps on the Thunder Creek Trail. The park also proposes to construct a new administrative camp near Junction Camp another 3.5 miles up the same trail. A washed out bridge with very large steel stringers formerly used to access a closed camp would be removed by helicopter. [Comments will be taken until May 1st.](#)

## Coalition Actions

Summary of recent developments within the Coalition, including some of the actions that CPANP took on your behalf. Links to specified documents are embedded in each entry.

- *Letter To WASO On eBike Rulemaking* – The Coalition [has sent a letter](#) to Acting Director Vela requesting that the NPS delay the eBike rulemaking process until at least next fall or as long as necessary until the effects of the pandemic begin to subside:
- *President’s Meeting With Oil Companies* – The Coalition [issued a statement](#) on the President's meeting with oil company execs last Friday, calling out the administration for prioritizing industry interests and refusing to postpone oil and gas lease sales, suspend ongoing public comment periods, or delay new policy proposals.
- *New Grand Canyon Superintendent* – CPANP also [issued a statement](#) on the selection of Edward Keable as the new superintendent of Grand Canyon, expressing our belief that he is not qualified to manage and lead a complicated park such as the Grand Canyon. This statement hit AP and ran in numerous national outlets, including the [New York Times](#).
- *Closing Shenandoah* – Coalition members and former Shenandoah superintendents Bill Wade, Jim Northup and Doug Morris signed on to [an op-ed article](#) in *The Hill* on the need to close the park during the pandemic (the park was subsequently shut down).
- *More Action On eBike Rulemaking* – CPANP [submitted comments](#) on the proposed eBike regulations, requesting that the NPS defer the rulemaking until after the nationwide COVID-19 crisis subsides and until it has prepared a programmatic NEPA review to evaluate potential adverse impacts of the rulemaking:

Source: Emily Thompson, Communications and Advocacy Coordinator.

## Park People

### **NPS Alumni**

#### **Passing Of Ben Attao**

Vicente “Ben” Cabrera Attao died on March 26th at Kootenai Medical Center in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho.

Born on Saipan, Ben went to college in Oregon, then moved to Lewiston and worked for Lewiston Grain Growers.

In 1986, Ben joined the National Park Service, working in maintenance at Nez Perce NHP. In 2003, he transferred back to his home island to work at American Memorial Park. He retired in 2017 and moved back to Idaho.

Private family services have already been held.

Source: [Lewiston Tribune](#).

### **NPS Alumni**

#### **Passing Of Wayne Norton**

Henry “Wayne” Norton, 94, died on April 1st in Moab.

After service in the Navy in WWII, Wayne studied forestry at Michigan State University.

In 1950, he accepted his first forestry job as a fire lookout at Yellowstone. He hitchhiked from Michigan to Yellowstone in four days to start his job. In 1953, he was offered a three-month seasonal position at Grand Canyon. He bought a small camp trailer and moved there with his wife and their five children. From there he was transferred to Great Smokey Mountain, where they lived through 1955.

In 1956, he was transferred to Montezuma Well in Arizona. The Park Service applied for and received a grant for \$66,000 in order to purchase three, three-bedroom houses and he and his family lived in one of those homes. His children fondly remember their time at the Great Sand Dunes from 1958 to 1966 and Arches from 1966 to 1974. He then transferred to Padre Island and retired from the NPS in 1979.

He and his wife moved to Moab. They built a home in Spanish Valley and lived there for 38 years.

A graveside service was held on Friday, April 3rd. A memorial service will be held at a later date after the travel ban concludes. Condolences may be sent to the family at [www.SpanishValleyMortuary.com](http://www.SpanishValleyMortuary.com).

Source: [Moab Times-Independent](#).

## **From The Archives**

This section contains incidents taken from *Morning Report* issues published during the corresponding week (approximately) 25 years ago in 1995. All entries appear in the original verb tense; “submitters” are those people who originally submitted the incident report.

- *Rocky Mountain NP* – On April 7th, Felicia Cowan and her two children, Jaseph, 11, and Cavin, 5, headed out on a backpacking trip across the continental divide by way of the Flattop and North Inlet trails. They had little snow or cold weather experience. After crossing the divide, the pack containing their camping gear fell onto a frozen creek; while trying to retrieve it, the mother fell through the ice into chest-deep water. All of their equipment was lost. They left their soaked sleeping bags, tent and extra clothing along the creek side and continued along the North Inlet trail. After spending two nights in temperatures below freezing with only their coats for warmth, Felicia Cowan left her children, who could no longer walk due to frostbite, and hiked to the trailhead to obtain help. There she met a rescue team preparing to leave in search of the family. Ranger Chris Ryan, VIP Bill Keiss and Firepro staffer Ray Miller found the children near the Big Pool backcountry site. The children's feet and hands were exposed, and Cavin had become lethargic and sleepy from hypothermia. The rescuers bundled the children in clothing and carried them a mile and a half to a site where a helicopter from St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction had landed. The flight nurse determined that Cavin's core body temperature had dropped to 88 degrees. Both are being treated for frostbite and hypothermia. Submitted by Sharon Brubaker.
- *Yosemite NP* – On April 13th, rangers were notified of four distressed climbers at Camp Six on the nose of El Capitan. It had been snowing and raining throughout the day, and it appeared that the climbers, who were suspended about 3,000 feet from the Valley floor on a vertical wall, were suffering from hypothermia. A major rescue operation involving over 60 people was initiated. Rescue team members on snowshoes and skis and in snow cats were unable to reach the top of El Capitan due to deep snows covering the 16-mile route. During a break in the weather, a Lemoore NAS helicopter and an NPS contract helicopter flew an 11-person rescue team to the top of El Capitan. Team members were lowered 600 overhanging feet to the stranded climbers. The climbers were able to ascend to the top, but only with extreme difficulty and through the assistance of the team members. All four recovered from their hypothermia. The rescue operation and ascent were hampered by high winds, frozen ropes, and sheets of ice dropping on rescuers. Investigation showed that the victims were grossly underprepared for what was a typical Yosemite spring storm. Ranger Mary Litell led the rescue. Submitted by Chief Ranger's Office.
- *Hawaii Volcanoes NP* – Three of four people arrested for car clouts in the park last year have pled guilty to theft and conspiracy charges in federal district court in Honolulu. The arrests

stemmed from 22 larcenies from motor vehicles - all with similar MO's - that occurred between May and October of 1994. A joint investigation was initiated by rangers and Hawaii County officers that led to the identification of a number of suspects in both the car clouting incidents and in thefts and use of credit and ATM cards. A search was conducted at their residence and items from 20 of the park cases and from 10 to 15 county cases were recovered. The four suspects were arrested (a fifth remains at large). The first arrested, Cerina Cottrell, 20, was five months pregnant at the time. While being flown to federal marshals in Honolulu in the company of rangers and FBI agents, Cottrell reported that she was experiencing labor pains. An ambulance was summoned to the airport, and Cottrell was taken to a local hospital. She did not deliver, though, and the attending physician said that she had apparently pretended contractions in an effort to avoid going to jail. Michael Nakamura, 20, who had earlier assaulted an officer and fled, was located in Kaneohe; although he again fled on foot, he was caught and arrested. Jeffrey Menza and Malania Kipika were apprehended without incident. Menza, Nakamura and Kipika all pled guilty and will be sentenced in June and July. Cottrell's case is set for trial in July. Submitted by Scott Hinson.

## **Acknowledgements**

This newsletter comes to you through the efforts of a number of people:

- Production: Steve Pittleman
- Regular Correspondents: Don Hellmann, Dennis Burnett, Rick Smith, Emily Thompson, and Duncan Morrow
- Issue Contributors: Dave Lattimore, Joan Anzelmo

If you see something that might be of interest to Coalition members, send it to Bill Halainen at the Weekly National Park System Report: [BHalainen@gmail.com](mailto:BHalainen@gmail.com). Please don't submit them via his personal email address or Facebook page.

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The *Weekly National Park System Report* is a publication of The Coalition To Protect America's National Parks. It is prepared by Coalition member Bill Halainen, former editor of the *NPS Morning Report*, and produced and disseminated by Coalition member Steve Pittleman.

The Coalition is a non-profit organization of past and current NPS employees and their allies that "studies, educates, speaks, and acts for the preservation and protection of the National Park System and mission-related programs of the National Park Service."

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